

HAND REARING ORPHAN PUPPIES

The following is based on our experience and we cannot be held responsible for its content. It is offered in good faith but would strongly advise, if in doubt, to check with your vet.

We have been asked to write something on hand rearing puppies. First thing I would like to say is, if you don't have to do it, don't, it can be heartbreaking as well as rewarding. However faced with an emergency you may have no choice, so have a go.

SURROGATE BITCHES

The first thing to do, faced with this, is to look for a surrogate bitch/bitches and there are a few avenues where you can search.

1. Ask fellow breeders if they know of anyone who has a litter and who can take one or two.
2. Champdogs.co.uk is a good site to go on, they have a forum and I have personally found people of other breeds very helpful. Word spreads quickly and if there is a bitch out there you will find it.
3. We have found the local radio station and paper very helpful.
4. Your vet and other vets in the area may know of a bitch with a small litter.

If you find a surrogate bitch ask the owner to remove the bitch while you take one of her puppies and make it defecate and/or wee on the puppy you want her to adopt. Rub this around the puppy and place it in the nest with her litter. Give a little time for the smells to mingle and you will find most bitches will then take to the puppy with little problem. You need to make sure the litter and your puppy are around the same age. You don't want your puppy's eyes opening later than the rest of the litter or they will get pushed around.

While the search is on you have to keep the babies alive, so here are few tips we have found that work for us.

FEEDING THE LITTER

Purchase a heat pad, they are cheap enough, and place it in the bottom of a crisp box with a cover on the pad that you can wash. We use pillow cases for this as the puppy cannot get under the cloth and get too hot. It is surprising how they dig around in the material, and this will keep the puppies in the right environment. You can use a heat lamp we have found under bed heating much better and if you keep a thermometer in the box and it is around 21c (70F) with under heat we have found this about right. Leave a cool area in the box in case the puppy gets too hot it can then crawl away from the heat. Puppies are very dependant at birth so keep good records, record their daily weight, what they took at the bottle, whether they urinated or defecated and the general condition. It is priceless to have these records both for now and future litters.

One thing you will have to watch is not to overfeed, I know of many puppies that have been killed by overfeeding milk in the early days. Little and often is the best and

we find a slight press on the tummy will tell you if the pup is full the pup so it does not need to be engorged. Feed every two hours and start with 10ml given by syringe first and later a bottle. We do tube feed, but this is something you have to be taught, so ask your vet to show you how to do it if it is really necessary. A big litter can be difficult to hand rear, timing wise, so tube feeding can make it easier on you but you need to know what you are doing. We have found a human catheter is the thing to use and we measure from the mouth to the umbilical cord and make a mark on the tube with a black felt pen. This is the distance you have to insert the tube but again I would stress do not do it if you can help it, and if so, get someone like your vet, to show you how to do it. I have taught a few people over the years but you need to be confident. Sometimes, if the puppy will not suck, you have no choice and we always think that it is better to have a go rather than let the little dog die unnecessarily.

As the puppies grow you can encourage them to suck on a bottle. In the early days I often insert a clean finger in the puppy's mouth, let it suck and thread a syringe down the side, with practise you can press the syringe and gradually get the puppy to take the feed. We then move to a baby bottle, we find the best is one that is designed for a premature baby, they are great, and the teat is just right. The Catac bottles for puppies we find too small for a deerhound and the teat too hard. Think how big a teat is on a bitch and you can see how a tiny teat will be not good. Don't be tempted to enlarge the hole as the sucking instinct has to be taught and is good for the puppy. It has to learn to work for its food. Yes! I know it is quicker to enlarge the hole but not as good for the puppy. This is where you can pull in friends and family to help, you have to share this as you cannot maintain the 2 hourly feeds without getting some sleep yourself.

A cow's milk contains 1/2 the fat of bitches milk but more lactose. There are many proprietary brands of milk on the market, Welpi being the one most people recommend although being of the 'old school' we still use 6oz evaporated milk 6oz boiled water with 1 teaspoon glucose 1 small egg yolk (no white) This is not recommended for sick puppies where we would use Welpi mixed to the manufacturer's requirement. There are some good cholesterol products you can purchase if the puppies have not had any milk from the dam but we have no experience of these although we do tend to give them a little live yoghurt. We have been lucky in getting some first milk from a cow that has just calved which is always kept in the freezer - we use this for the first 2/3 feeds but we are not sure if it works as well. Maybe someone else may know more, if so let us know.

After every 2 or 3rd feed you must stimulate the puppy to empty its bladder and bowel. (We try every puppy after every feed but make note of any that do not empty themselves) Take a piece of wet cotton wool and for the bitch's stroke from the middle of the tummy down to the vulva with slightly more pressure underneath the tail. Don't give up too easily, this has to be done even if the puppy is slow. With the males you must stroke up towards the penis to get the pup to wee and down towards the tail to get it defecate. At all times keep the cotton wool moistened with water or you can make the puppy sore. All this can take time but be patient it will happen. Occasionally puppies hand fed will get constipated, this can be a sign the milk is too rich - you can insert a tiny plug of warm Vaseline and massage it into the anus this will usually be enough to get the puppy to pass the stool. Never give liquid paraffin as it can irritate

the intestines and if you do need to give an enema again consult your vet. Once you have been shown how to do it you will get confident.

In the second week you can start to extend the night feeds slightly. Keep the 2 hourly up during daylight hours but if you feed one late around midnight (Mick does that one as I go to bed at 9pm) you can get another on in at 4 (that one is mine to do) then up at 7ish for another which Mick does. This means we both get some quality sleep and it is practical and does not seem to harm the puppies at all.

Feeding programme for healthy puppies

At 2 weeks give 9 feeds spread evenly over 24 hours

At 3 weeks give 7 feeds from 6am to midnight

At 4 weeks give 6 feeds from 7am to midnight

At 5 weeks give 5 feeds spread from 7am to 11 pm

At 6 weeks 4 feeds from 7am to 11pm

We have found that as the puppies grow they get very smelly and messy. The bitch usually keeps the litter clean so we often have to wash them in warm soapy water (use a good baby shampoo) and dry well on a clean soft towel or use a low heat hair dryer but if you put the puppies on a soft paper shred bed this will help to keep them in good order.

The way we check their progress is to weigh them daily. They should put on 2/3 oz per day if they are growing right. By doing this you can tell if one is falling by the wayside and do something about it by upping the feed slightly. Our puppies usually have doubled their birth weight in 7 - 10 ays.

SICK PUPPIES

Don't be tempted to give milk to a sick puppy. While every instinct is to put milk into the puppy we often start our puppies on glucose and electrolyte - we have found boiled water and liquid life aid very successful. It is sold in most corn merchants and is used for re-hydrating farm stock. I do believe there is similar available from Pedigree or your vet but it is always more expensive. 2 or 3 feeds of life aid with water have saved many puppies. We have even had to inject water under the skin of the puppy to get it hydrated quickly but only with the assistance of the vet so we would not advocate you doing this without the vets advice. You can however test for dehydration by a pinch test. Take the skin on the back of the puppy in a pinch and if it stays raised the puppy is dehydrated, the urine will become darker and the motions can become lumpy. It is important you act immediately as dehydration can kill very quickly but recovery is good.

A very young puppy can suffer colic, and again this can be due to incorrect feed. You will hear a nasty cry like a seagull which nearly drives you around the bend. Infracol from the chemist (it is for young babies with colic) works but often the pain can cause a lot of stress. Pain and stress again are killers but we have found an eye dropper

rescue remedy (in one case a tiny drop of whisky worked) along with the Infracol will help settle the puppy and relieve the pain. This condition is not to be mistaken for fading puppies which is more bacterial and need a vets attention There is an interesting article on this by Dr Sharon McCrea in our site.

The colour of the mucous membranes can give some indication as to what is going on with a sick puppy.

DEEP CHERRY RED can indicate bacterial infection and veterinary treatment is necessary.

BRIGHT RED can occurs with hyperthermia (cause - being nursed in too high a temperature). Lower the temperature slowly, you can use a little ice pack but be careful you don't cause hypothermia. This condition is usually caused by the puppy being put on a water bottle that is too hot.

PALE can indicate hypothermia (causes, being nursed in too low a temperature, shock, fading, or malnutrition) never feed puppy milk in this condition as it cannot digest and treatment is very urgent. Puppies are very dependant and get very cold quickly. They have no control over their body temperature and this is a frequent cause of early death. The puppies will appear limp and lifeless and be hard to get back so act quickly. Raise the puppy's temperature slowly to avoid the puppy going into shock it may take a couple of hours to warm the pup but do not try and feed it with anything other than glucose and electrolyte and only around 2/3 ml every 1/2 hour. If you feed milk it will stagnate in the stomach and cause more problems, as the pup warms up the gums will become pink and if you can get a sucking reflex going you know you are winning. If the sucking reflex is not there you will have to tube feed. This condition can be heartbreaking and it is a difficult one to win,

Another tip is don't be tempted to wean too early by putting things in the bottle. A puppy cannot take protein too early so 3 weeks is soon enough. You can get the puppies to lap earlier than 3 weeks but only feed milk feeds with maybe a little baby rice and glucose but certainly we would not feed protein before 3 weeks . We do keep the pups on with the bottle even after 3 weeks as a top up to their solid feed. Not sure why, but we enjoy it, and they seem too also.

Kilbourne Etta (see above) was hand fed and went on to take **BOB** at Crufts - Handfed pups often are slower to grow but they will make it in the end. Bone and size is bred not fed in our opinion.

We are always open to questions and are still learning ourselves so if you have anything that has worked for you let us know and if we can help you, give us a ring but the bottom line is, if in doubt, **ASK YOUR VET.**

Mick and Glenis Peach